



Proposal for an Interpretation Centre

Adrian Toole for Transition Exmouth. V1 March 8th 2021

Introduction

There is a clear need in Exmouth to expand on the traditional concept of a Visitor Centre by explaining, through a 21st C experience, the place of Exmouth in the world. We had a unique past and a lively present, and now need to develop in a new way to ensure a sustainable future.

This proposal, which we hope will lead to a scoping study, is made in the context of fulfilling the Exmouth Neighbourhood Plan, which was 'made' as part of the Development Plan for East Devon on 11th April 2019.

In its 'Implementation strategy, Exmouth Town Council have stated:

'Moving forward, Exmouth Town Council's involvement in the Neighbourhood Plan process will transition from a plan-making focus to an infrastructure and project-delivery focus.'

With a concluding statement:

'Neighbourhood plans are fundamentally a new tool to give communities more control over the type, location, size, pace and design of development in their area, introduced under the Localism Act 2011 as part of a suite of new community rights. Implementing, monitoring and revising the Exmouth Neighbourhood Plan will create new opportunities for Exmouth Town Council, and these must be fully exploited for the benefit of the community.'

Relevant NP Proposals

Within the NP is Community Action NEA7; in APPENDIX 3: Community Action Implementation, Monitoring and Delivery Plan, this was revised somewhat in the 'made' plan and there reads:

'ACTION NEA7: For the Neighbourhood Plan to support organizations in assessing the need, viability and most effective sitting of an Interpretation Information Centre and ask the EDDC Countryside Team and relevant voluntary bodies to address the need for a more comprehensive approach to environmental education/public awareness. Responsibility: DCC, EDDC, ETC'

This is to be supported by all the councils (EEMP?) and the status of the Action in August 2019 was described thus:

'Historically, plans to build a Jurassic Coast visitor centre in Exmouth gained some traction in 2010 but suffered a setback when the volunteer board appointed to oversee the project was dissolved. The Exmouth and Seaton Interpretation Centres Board was originally formed to oversee the delivery of the project in Exmouth and Seaton. However, applications to the Big Lottery, Living Landmarks and Sea Change schemes proved unsuccessful and the South West Regional Development Agency withdrew funding of £1.25 million per centre. This left both projects relying on local authority support to ensure that the necessary buildings were provided.

The favoured site in Exmouth was on the Imperial Recreation Ground, with additional land earmarked near the Mamhead Slipway for a separate seafront 'interpretation' centre. At the present time, there is no viable scheme and currently no prospect of a realistic proposal likely to come forward but environmental education and public awareness is being delivered by several different stakeholders throughout the Town, including EDDC's Countryside Team, the Jurassic Coast Trust and the Exe Estuary Management Partnership. EDDC's Countryside Team plays a key role in actively engaging the community with their natural environment: <https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/2717789/annual-review.pdf> Wild Exmouth is an exciting project that is helping enhance the environment of the town, engaging residents with green spaces and improving access to nature via community events, volunteer days, campaigns and improved information and mapping over the next three years. This project is funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, Exmouth Town Council and East Devon District Council.

A key objective of the Exe Estuary Management Partnership is also to provide greater understanding of the importance of the Exe Estuary through a continuing programme of education and interpretation provision.

Further details of how this is being achieved can be found in the Plan here:

<https://www.exe-estuary.org/documents/172437/176898/Exe+Estuary+Management+Plan+2016-2021+-+Final+low+res.pdf/1cb2c32b-daec-43f4-977f-c6e3aff8763f>

Exmouth Town Council has specifically helped to fund a review of existing interpretation panels / signage around the Estuary and has secured funding via the Parishes Together Fund for new signage which will be installed by the Partnership during the latter part of 2019.

The council will continue to press for the provision of an interpretation centre within Exmouth and will support any associated third-party viability study.'

Transition Exmouth is not aware of any further progress. Transition Exmouth member Noel Harrower has long been lobbying for this facility and in January 2021 Transition Exmouth was invited to submit a proposal.

Note: there is a long-standing need in the town for a community centre; in recent years this concept has been extended to encompass an Arts Centre, a Health & Wellbeing Centre and an Eco-Hub. These concepts are reflected in other actions in the Neighbourhood Plan. Transition Exmouth, as a leading community group, is certainly in favour of all of these, but this proposal focusses on only one specific need.

Purpose of the Interpretation Centre

Wikipedia defines the concept thus:

An interpretation centre, interpretive centre, or visitor interpretive centre is an institution for dissemination of knowledge of natural or cultural heritage. Interpretation centres are a kind of new-style museum, often associated with visitor centres or eco-museums, and located in connection to cultural, historic or natural sites.

The Exmouth Interpretation Centre will disseminate knowledge of the Past, Present, and Future of Exmouth; its unique natural beauties, history, culture, and the challenges of the future. We are using the working title 'Exmouth Past, Present, and Future' Aspects of these are listed below in an appendix from which there is plenty of scope for a variety of interactive, themed displays.

This is our outline proposal, presenting the case for further research into the scope for such a centre in Exmouth, most suitably to be located within the Queens Drive Development, Phase 3.

Operation of the Interpretation Centre

To do full justice to our theme in conventional displays, we would need a large building with many staff. That is both unrealistic and unnecessary. We will instead rely largely on current advances in information technology.

As currently envisaged, the physical exhibition area will be relatively modest and could be combined in location and for staffing purposes with a Visitor Centre. Researchers will be tasked with producing graphic displays on as many as possible of the identified themes, these will appear both on large cycling display screens and at a range of consoles whereat the user can flip through all the graphics. They will also be available online so that visitors and locals can access them away from the physical Centre.

The graphics can only provide the top-level facts/images and this will be sufficient for most people however by incorporation of QR codes, a user is able to bring up a fuller story on a suitable display device outside the Interpretation Centre and at any time. This content can of course be provided via other routes independent of the Interpretation Centre. Each theme would be presented together with suggestions for further involvement. there will be something for everyone.

With this physical layout, maximum use of space and human resources can be achieved. The Interpretation Centre will thereby have an existence outside the walls of the building. Consoles could also be installed in other locations around the town and online presence would make them accessible anywhere in the town or indeed world.

We believe also that this approach to disseminating information, is in-line with contemporary practice in museums and libraries and elsewhere. In this way, we will be making a statement about Exmouth's place in the modern world and by employing dynamic visuals, will have found a contemporary way of telling our story that will engage and motivate users to further involvement.

Proposal

We do not have to re-invent the wheel. In recent years, many other organisations have approached similar challenges and come up with successful, innovative, and even profitable solutions. Further research is needed before briefing an expert to produce a costed proposal. This research would comprise, searching the world for locations that have presented themselves in similar ways. The various approaches discovered would inform this group in their recommendation.

Appendix

In Exmouth we have much inherited culture and history to celebrate whilst enjoying all that the town currently offers. The future however, by any reckoning, is a challenge.

Following are lists (in random order) of aspects of Exmouth that can and should be explored (by community groups?) in the Interpretation Centre over the years ahead.

Past

A fascinating history and changing history

- 250m year old Geology
- The Biodiversity and Tree Cover of Exmouth 10,000, 1000, 100 and 10 years ago
- On one of Britain's most important estuaries
- Start of the UNESCO designated Devon Heritage Coast, the 'Jurassic Coast'
- Appearance on ancient Roman map
- Pre-Saxon parishes and Byzantine coins
- Early beginnings as a fishing community, the Sir Walter Raleigh connection
- Shipbuilding
- Pirate William Kyd and the Barbary corsairs
- Waste & carbon emissions produced per household through the ages - Amount and type
- Re-invention as a Georgian holiday destination
- Arrival of the railways and Exmouth's Victorian heyday
- Typical meal through the years with its food miles
- The famous flower grower
- Pratteshide and the Starcross ferry
- Lifeboats
- Famous Exmothians
- The Zoo and other family seafront amusements
- Exmouth in two world wars
- Farming through the ages
- Rolle College
- Brick making
- Fishing
- Commercial harbour

Present

Largest town in Devon and still expanding!

- Major beach resort
- Environmental footprint of Exmouth at present, compared to what is sustainable (waste, co2 emissions etc)
- Devon Cliffs Holiday Park: 1/4m staycationers a year
- Redevelopment
- Marina
- Three-tier local authority area
- Town Centre and Strand re-development
- Exmouth Museum
- Loss of traditional industries
- Fishing and nautical industries
- Farming
- Transition Town
- OurPlaceOurPlanet.org
- Exe Sailing Club
- Deaf Academy
- Exmouth Community College
- Eight Primary Schools
- South-West Coast Path and Exe Estuary Trail
- Community Groups

- A La Ronde
- Stunning ecosystems in town & close by - migrating birds on the Exe, the sea-life in Lyme Bay, the open spaces of Woodbury Common, Bystock pool, and others.
- Storms, flooding and flood prevention schemes
- Great sporting opportunities/achievements
- Pleasure & wildlife cruises
- Wonderful NHS services
- Alternative health centres
- Gym, swimming pool & exercise opportunities
- Community organisations
- Charities
- Library
- Transport links
- Independent clubs
- Artists & art clubs
- Numerous food & Drink venues
- Allotments, gardens, and garden centres
- Phear Park & Manor Gardens
- Exmouth Festival
- Thriving live music scene

Future

A sense that we hold this in trust for future generations will resonate with Exmouth's family visitors and residents alike.

- Transition Town Projects
- Waste, carbon emissions: sustainable targets
- Biodiversity increases in and around the town
- The changing high-street economy
- Town-centre re-development
- Employment - need for one significant corporate HQ?
- Encouraging 'Green' businesses & employment
- Keeping young people here
- The climate emergency
- Potential for more pedestrianisation in main centres
- Preserving and enhancing the natural environment
- Rising sea levels
- Harnessing the community
- How to attract with the high-tech industries
- The rise and rise of home-working
- Broadband and 5G
- Holiday accommodation
- How to manage the estuary both for humans & wildlife
- How to manage the commons both for humans & wildlife
- Empowering residents, especially Youth
- Looking after the disadvantaged in our community
- Making public transport work better
- Investment in active travel routes
- Our potential for renewable energy generation
- Noel Harrower's book: 'Yestermorrow'
- Are today's education facilities, suitable for tomorrow?
- My carbon footprint
- Aiming for a zero-carbon lifestyle
- Are our politicians taking up the challenge?
- Residents enjoying more outings to the Estuary, to the beach, and to the commons
- Continuing emphasis on developing the Town Centre and signage
- Future of Exmouth Museum
- Exmouth becomes a premier environmentally friendly family-holiday destination

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